

## Congress presses for harder line on Sudan diplomacy, arms embargo

Wednesday 16 December 2009.

By Daniel Van Oudenaren

December 15, 2009 (WASHINGTON) – Lawmakers in Washington this Monday and Tuesday called on President Obama and senior officials to take a harder line against the government led by President Omar Al-Bashir, which is in trilateral negotiations with the United States and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement.

The Obama Administration's unveiling of its official strategy toward Sudan in October was greeted domestically with some hesitation but general approval. Since then, the presidential envoy Scott Gration, who is currently on diplomatic travel, has continued to articulate a defense of his trips to meet with members of Sudan's senior political leadership.

Secretary Clinton, for her part, in a speech Monday evening suggested that the Administration's approach to human rights has added a considered dose of realism to US diplomacy, saying "we must be pragmatic and agile in pursuit of our human rights agenda – not compromising on our principles, but doing what is most likely to make them real." In a mention of Sudan, she recommended "we have to continue to press for solutions," without elaboration whereby.

But such voices from within the US Executive Branch were met this week with a broadside of criticism and advice from lawmakers, activists, Sudanese expatriates, and an independent commission established by Congress.

In a move led by Senators Russ Feingold and John McCain, 27 total senators signed a letter calling for the UN Security Council to turn to violations of the UN arms embargo on Darfur. The letter, addressed to Ambassador Susan Rice, the US envoy at the United Nations in New York, asks her to "begin a discussion at the Security Council about pressures that can be brought to bear against belligerents in Darfur in the case that these violations persist."

The senators endorsed recommendations made by a UN Panel of Experts who had concluded research on the abortive arms embargo on Darfur and presented their findings to the UN Secretary General and



then this month to the US Congress. Proposed steps include requiring Sudan's government to submit to the Security Council bimonthly reports on its movement of troops and materiel into and out of Darfur. Other information uncovered by the UN Panel may lead to additional US designations of individuals to be targeted for financial sanctions and travel bans, the senators' letter suggests.

Another open letter, addressed to President Obama, was released today by 50 leading Sudan advocates and Sudanese expatriates from around the country. It calls for "multilateral asset freezes and travel bans," support of the International Criminal Court cases against Sudanese officials, denial of debt relief, and enforcement of the UN arms embargo.

In the US House of Representatives, three members on Tuesday morning joined two members of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) at an "emergency press conference," as it was described by Rep. Chris Smith of New Jersey. The event marked the first public criticism of the Sudan policy from Rep. Frank Wolf, a legislator with long-standing involvement with the issue.

USCIRF Commission Chairman Leonard A. Leo, having recently returned from a five day visit to Khartoum, said "it is time for the United States to exercise strength. The policy of engagement – 'cookies and gold stars' – is not working. It is emboldening Khartoum to a point where this peace process is perilously close to failure."

The sudden renewed furor over Sudan comes after recent crackdowns on demonstrators in Khartoum who were led in part by politicians of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement. The latter party, a signatory to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), objects to major gaps in implementation of the 2005 deal, whose terms are set to expire in January 2011.

Mr. Leo, in a statement taken as he was making his return last Thursday, said that "Leadership will come only from the top, and many of the officials we met were urging the Commission to take home a plea for greater US strength and pressure on recalcitrant signatories. We call upon Secretary Clinton in the next two weeks to send a strong message to the CPA signatory parties, as well as the international community, by personally standing with the peace process and seeking to reestablish a level playing field for free and fair implementation of the CPA."

Also calling for leadership from the top, President of the Save Darfur Coalition Jerry Fowler noted, "With elections rapidly approaching and the atmosphere getting more and more volatile, the situation in Sudan cries out for presidential leadership. In his Nobel address, President Obama recognized that the 'world must stand together as one' in dealing with recalcitrant regimes like Sudan's. That will not happen without sustained engagement by President Obama himself."

(ST)

Copyright © 2003-2008 SudanTribune - All rights reserved.